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Intelligence Report

No. 8474 DEPARTMENT OF STATE May 29, 1961
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JUN 27 1961

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MOSSOW HESITANT ON CUBA'S "SOCIALIST" STATE

Moscow has taken note of, but has not endorsed, the recent assertion of Fidel Castro that Cuba is a "socialist" state. The record indicates that, despite obvious Soviet pleasure at communist inroads in Cuba and the Cuban potential for influencing other Latin American countries, Moscow has not envisaged for the present at least the establishment of a full-blown, officially-avowed communist state in Cuba. Such a development might involve commitments Moscow does not wish to make and jeopardize the power of attraction of the Cuban example in Latin America.

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Cuban Statements

In his Habana May Day 1961 speech, Castro asserted that he had effected a "socialist revolution," established a new social system called "socialism," and proclaimed that his was a "socialist regime." Although the Cuban leader was vague as to details, his statements clearly implied that Cuba was "socialist" in the communist sense of the term.

The classic communist Leninist-Stalinist definition of a "socialist" state includes several criteria such as nationalization of industry, collectivization in the countryside, etc., upon which there is usually some flexibility and variation, depending on the exigencies of local conditions. However, the sine qua non for a "socialist" state, in the communist view, has always been a publicly acknowledged "leading"

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or "vanguard" role -- in practice, the effective exercise of dictatorial power -- by the communist forces themselves. Such a regime is described by the communists as a "dictatorship of the proletariat" -- meaning of the communists -- and is usually based on a "worker-peasant" alliance.

Anibal Escalante, Executive Secretary of the Cuban Popular Socialist (Communist) Party (PSP), in a lecture at Popular University in early May defined Cuban socialism in classic communist terms -- nationalization of industry, establishment of cooperatives in the countryside, etc. -- except on the key point. He was vague on the question of the revolutionary vanguard -- i.e., where the locus of power lay in the Cuban state. He implied that Castro's 26 July Movement ("nationalist") and the PSP were different but are somehow becoming integrated.

This is a deviation from fundamental communist doctrine and practice, but one which might be resolved in the future. In an interview with East German newspaper Ostsee-Zeitung, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Politburo member of the PSP, stated that by July 26, (1961), the anniversary of the Santiago 1953 uprising, the PSP and the rebel movement would be merged.

None of the Cubans have claimed that Cuba was a member of the socialist camp -- i.e., the communist bloc -- but this is the implication of statements that Cuba is now a "socialist" state, supported by other socialist states.

Soviet Reaction Guarded

Moscow's reaction to these Cuban claims has been most cautious. The Soviets have in fact generally ignored the claims, mentioning them directly on only two occasions. Pravda on May 3, 1961 carried a dispatch from its Habana correspondent summarizing Castro's May Day speech, and the summary included a direct quote from Castro proclaiming, "This new social system is called socialism, and the new constitution, consequently, will be a socialist one!"

Moscow's other direct acknowledgement of the Castro regime's claim to being socialist was contained in Khrushchev's speech in Yerevan on May 7. Khrushchev took note of American statements that Cuba constituted a threat to the US; pointed out that although Cuba was only 90 miles from the US its population was only 6 million while that of the US was 160 million; and rhetorically asked what was the source of US concern. The Soviet leader then answered that the source of US concern was "in the fact that Cuba has declared that it has entered the path of constructing socialism. This is its strength, and this is the weakness of America. This is what pleases me as a communist. This is the reward

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we communists receive: when American monopolists or their representatives say that Cuba threatens them, by the same token they admit the weakness of capitalism and the strength of communism."

Khrushchev's statement thus constituted an expression of satisfaction at communism's inroads in Cuba. But by stating that Cuba has declared itself to be socialist, rather than that it is socialist, he stopped short of endorsing Cuban claims.

The Soviet press has also on at least two occasions carried statements of Cuban leaders referring to Cuba's "democratic and socialist revolution." But these statements constitute a less specific claim to status in the communist world than the Castro-Escalante statements, and are similar to remarks by neutralist leaders of underdeveloped countries, which have also been noted with comment by Soviet media.

Evidence of Soviet Displeasure

It is possible that Soviet reticence reflects an agreed tactic with Cuban communists to gradually introduce the idea of communist rule in Cuba. However, the evidence indicates that this reticence reflects Soviet displeasure with Castro and with the PSP.

The Soviets coined the concept of "national democracy" with Cuba in mind. The programmatic statement issued December 6, 1960 by the conference of world communist party leaders in Moscow defined a "national democratic state" as one which, internationally, had a strong anti-Western orientation and, domestically, pursued the course of "social reform" desired by the communists.

East German communist leader Walter Ulbricht's report on the Moscow conference, published in Neues Deutschland December 18, asserted: "Undoubtedly the revolution of the Cuban people has created a national democratic state which has already fulfilled the tasks of a national liberation and democratic revolution and which is now waging a struggle for further social progress." And he contrasted the Cuban example with that of the United Arab Republic, where there was still dependence on Western capital and where a "democratic order" -- i.e., toleration of local communists -- had not been developed.

Although the "national democratic state" was thus clearly conceived as one moving in the direction desired by the communists, and eventually paving the way for communist rule, the implication of the definition was that such a state was led by nationalist rather than communist leaders. Subsequent elaboration of the concept has made this crystal clear.

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Moscow's leading theoretician on communist strategy in the under-developed countries, Academician Ye. Zhukov, further elaborated on the "national democratic state" concept in Pravda on January 5, 1961. And in so doing he specifically asserted that "the state of national democracy is not a state of a socialist type." He added, however, that such a state paved the way for an "easier, less painful transition to the true path of non-capitalist development." It thus appears that the "national democratic state," and the Cuban regime specifically, were not viewed by Soviet and communist strategists as full-fledged communist states but rather as something heading in that direction.

It is, of course, possible that the Soviets conceived the idea of the "national democratic state" merely as a cover for actual communist rule. This was suggested by East German leader Hermann Matern, whose report on the Moscow conference (Neues Deutschland, December 23) almost equated the term "people's democracy" --- the communist-type states set up by Moscow in East Europe --- with national democracy but implied that for tactical reasons "the application of such formulations as a people's democracy would be wrong and unsuitable" for countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

It seems more likely, however, that the Soviets mean what they have specifically stated, namely that the "national democratic state" is viewed as a convenient vehicle which the communists can use to gradually assume total power by working through radical nationalists. This concept is quite at odds with Castro's proclamation.

In any event, the Cuban communists disagreed with the "national democratic state" concept when it was launched by the Soviets last year and in general have advocated a more rapid time schedule for seizing total power and proclaiming a socialist state. Matern noted in his report on the Moscow November conference that at that conference, and also at the sessions of the editorial commission which preceded it in October, the Brazilian and Cuban comrades objected to the "national democratic state" definition.

Reliable reports on the proceedings of these meetings make clear that these Latin American delegates did in fact object to the concept. Escalante emphasized the communist aspects of the Cuban regime (worker-peasant alliance, democracy of the peoples, etc.); specifically stated the PSP's opposition to the national democracy concept; and asserted that "we need to find a new definition." Escalante also emphasized Cuban reliance on armed struggle as a means of achieving power, a tactic which Moscow does not eschew but has tried to de-emphasize --- over strong Chinese Communist objections.

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Reasons for Soviet Displeasure

There are two major explanations why the USSR may view with displeasure what it probably regards as precipitate haste by the Cubans in proclaiming the establishment of a communist regime.

First, if Moscow is forced at this stage to recognize Cuba as a socialist state (whether or not it believes the Castro regime fits the classic definition of dictatorship of the proletariat), this ipso facto increases the Soviet commitment to defend Castro in the event of a US. attack, a course the Soviets wish to avoid at this stage in the world power balance.

Secondly, the proclamation of a communist regime in Cuba tends to scare off noncommunist revolutionaries of Latin America who might otherwise collaborate with the communists, and increases chances for effective OAS countermeasures. It thus tends to undercut broader Soviet interests in Latin America, interests which are otherwise served by the Castro regime.

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